

Of Value

by Glass Houses

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Summary: Obi-Wan finds something he shouldn't. Feedback: You bet!

ghouses@yahoo.com

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Obi-Wan couldn't talk to his Master about what he had found. After all, he really shouldn't have been in that closet drawer. Yes, he was duty bound to pack his Master's equipment for missions and other travel, and had done so for the past decade. Yes, haste was necessary because they were scheduled to leave for Galos II in only three standard hours. Still, when he didn't find the comlink attachment in its normal place, he should have asked Qui-Gon, instead of going on an expedition for it in his Master's private closet.

During the three-day flight to Galos II, Obi-Wan's discovery continued to seriously affect his ability to meditate, study for their upcoming mission, and find his center. He simply couldn't think about anything else.

Why had his Master kept it? How did he get it in the first place? Why did Qui-Gon consider it such a treasure? For that is how Obi-Wan found it, wrapped carefully in a piece of silk and placed in a small, trillium metal case.

None of Qui-Gon's things - mission mementos, gifts from his friends and his first Padawan - were kept in such a way as it was.

Obi-Wan tried to think of something that he had given his Master which was treated in a comparable manner, but could not. As a young Padawan, he had brought home his share of art and sculpture projects

from class and they were displayed, for a time, in the common room of their quarters. His Master still kept a few of them, but as with all of Qui-Gon's possessions, they tended to accumulate dust on the back shelves. Qui-Gon simply didn't have much use for material possessions, and carefully maintained only those items he relied upon for their missions. Qui-Gon certainly valued nothing Obi-Wan had ever made or given him enough to cover it in silk, protect it in a precious metal case and carefully place it out of harm's way.

Obi-Wan sighed at the relentlessness of his own circular thoughts and reread the mission briefing for the third time. Concentrate! This thing was nothing - at least not any business of his.

Their mission was to negotiate between a splinter faction and the Galos government over representation in the planet's governing body. It had gone well until the very hour they were scheduled to leave. Their last official role was to attend the signing of a new agreement ensuring ten more representatives for the Selos faction and a more equal basis for taxation of trade goods for the troubled region. In exchange, the Selos leaders had agreed to disarm and drop their claim to exclusive control over an important water source. Representatives from all sides, and the Jedi who had negotiated the agreements, gathered on a raised dais for the public ceremony.

Apparently, not all the Selos faction's members had disarmed. The attack caught everyone by surprise, but only one representative was hit by blaster fire before Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan had their lightsabers drawn and were defecting shots back at the attackers.

Obi-Wan was desperately trying to protect the representatives closest to him, but the shots were too numerous, and he had to make a split-second decision to deflect a shot destined for a representative or leave himself open to fire. There was no hesitation on his part; he protected the hysterical magistrate, but was less successful deflecting the bolt headed straight at himself. Part of the deadly energy bolt struck him above his ear. Time seemed to slow as he tumbled gracelessly off the dais. He dimly heard the barked commands of the Gelos Guard as they reacted to the attacks - the entire exchange didn't take more than four seconds - and heard Qui-Gon shouting for him. Then light and consciousness slowly faded away.

Obi-Wan awoke in an infirmary and immediately regretted it. His head throbbed like...like..., well, like he'd taken a partial blaster shot to the skull at close range, which he had. A groan escaped him and a worried and very tired looking Qui-Gon popped into his view.

"Obi-Wan, how do you feel?" he asked quietly.

"Please, Master, don't shout so loudly."

This produced a snort from Qui-Gon, and he reached out to touch Obi-Wan's face.

"You'll be fine, Padawan. You sustained some nasty blaster burns on the back of your head, and a concussion from your fall, but I was able to stabilize you during transport to the city infirmary. The local Healers say you will make a complete recovery."

"How long have I been here?"

"A full day."

Another small groan escaped Obi-Wan. "Good thing I'm thick-headed."

Qui-Gon smiled at the remark, and this simple expression lifted Obi-Wan's spirits considerably.

"Indeed Padawan. And once you are fully recovered, we will discuss the strategic value - or rather the lack thereof - of a dead Jedi in the protection of civilians during a sniper attack. It's admirable that you were willing to sacrifice yourself to save another, but if the Gelos Guard hadn't reacted as they did, I don't know that I could have controlled the situation without you."

Qui-Gon's words were spoken quietly, but his face was serious and inwardly Obi-Wan winced. He'd been so sure he should sacrifice himself rather than let a blaster bolt harm the representatives he was protecting. He hadn't thought to consider what would happen to the rest of the group - and Qui-Gon - with him incapacitated before the attack ended.

"Master...what happened...after," he asked in a not-so-steady voice.

"The Gelos Guard were able to erect an energy shield around the dais. Once the rebels realized they could no longer harm their intended targets, they ran. By the time emergency aircars arrived, most had been captured. No one except you was seriously injured."

"And the negotiations?"

"The treaty is still holding - probably because the Selos leaders aided in the capture of the rebel attackers."

Obi-Wan let go a mental sigh and felt a great weight he hadn't realized he was holding slide away.

"Rest now, Padawan. You should be able to leave the infirmary tomorrow morning. We'll depart for Courasant shortly thereafter. I have to finish the mission report and brief the Council."

"Yes, Master. I'm sorry, Master."

Qui-Gon's expression softened slightly, and his hand returned to lightly stroke Obi-Wan's cheek.

"Obi-Wan, you let your emotions control your actions. In all likelihood, however, you saved a life. You will learn from this experience."

"Thank you, Master."

"Rest now. I'll come for you in the morning."

Qui-Gon withdrew his hand and dimmed the lights in the small room. As Obi-Wan fell into a welcome sleep, he mourned the loss of that slight contact.

Obi-Wan woke early the next morning and expected the worse, but he actually felt somewhat better. The throbbing pain in his head had dulled to an ache, and the slight noise from the medical monitoring equipment in his room no longer sounded like the engine roar from a Star Cruiser. He braced his arms beside himself and slowly sat up. So far, so good. Something didn't feel quite right, however, and he automatically lifted one hand to his head and encountered...just his head.

No hair, not a strand.

The door to his room opened, and a healer shuffled in. Like all Gelosians, she was a short, bipedal reptilian lifeform with shiny brown scales instead of skin. A small mechanical device at her throat translated her soft hisses. "I'm Healer Nelaressss. How are you feeling thisss morning, Jedi Kenobi?"

"What happened to my hair?"

"Your...hair...." she paused a moment, "ah, your decorative fringe. Yesss, well your scalp was quite badly burned from the blaster shot. Much of the hair was gone anyway, and we removed the ressst to place bacta strips over your wounds. It will likely grow back."

"What about my braid? Was it still...attached when Master Jinn brought me here?"

Obi-Wan knew the last thing he should be concerned about was his hair, but he couldn't help himself from asking anyway. He had grown his Padawan braid since becoming Qui-Gon's apprentice 10 years ago, and it had hung down just past his waist. He already missed its presence.

"Yesss. I helped treat you upon your arrival and removed it along with ressst of your hair."

A single clear, rigid scale covered Nelaressss's eyes. Nevertheless, those eyes managed to convey a hint of humor at Obi-Wan's questions.

"My Master - was he here while you treated me?"

"Yessss. He would not leave."

"Did he... Did he ask for my braid? What happened to it?"

The healer made a throaty sound that her translation device didn't even attempt to decipher. "I sssaid your hair will grow back! Do not be concerned!"

"Yes, of course Healer Nelaressss, I thank you for everything you've done for me."

A sibilant sound issued from the Healer, softer this time. "Ressst

now. You will be released into Jedi Jinn's care shortly."

The simple act of standing caused nausea and dizziness, yet Obi-Wan was up and dressed when Qui-Gon arrived.

"Hello, Padawan, you look much better this morning."

Obi-Wan grimaced. "Yes, Master, if you say so," he murmured and unconsciously touched his hand to his bald head.

Qui-Gon just smiled and motioned towards the door. "It will grow back, Padawan."

"Yes, Master - so I hear."

Qui-Gon insisted Obi-Wan rest during most of the three-day trip to Courasant. He staged a brief rebellion a few hours into the flight, but waves of nausea and vertigo rising from an attempted stretching routine quickly quelled his restlessness. After their transport landed at the Temple, Obi-Wan was determined to walk by himself to the Temple infirmary. There, he was examined and again released into Qui-Gon's care with the stipulation that he refrain from all physical training, submit to frequent checkups, and rest in their shared quarters for the next 10 standard days.

For Obi-Wan, the journey from the infirmary to their quarters was an embarrassing one. He garnered quite a few shocked looks and inquiries into his condition, and there were also some friendly jibes from his peers. Qui-Gon walked slightly behind him, reversing their normal positions. Ready to offer help, but not insisting.

Once inside their quarters Qui-Gon promptly sat him down in a comfortable chair while he made them a light meal and tea. He carried the meal tray into the common room, placed it on a small table in front of Obi-Wan's chair and then sat on the couch directly opposite. They fell to eating and talking.

"What do you think Bant meant by that remark, Master?"

"Padawan..."

"Probably the same thing Nigel did when he called me 'Padawan Windu.' "

"Obi-Wan..."

"Master, I will need to requisition a wig."

"Obi-Wan! You will do no such thing! Hair matters not." Qui-Gon smiled as he badly imitated Master Yoda. They finished the small meal and Qui-Gon poured them tea.

"Master...."

"Yes?"

Silence.

"Yes, Obi-Wan?" Qui-Gon prompted.

Obi-Wan hesitated. How could he still be thinking about it? But then how could he not given the circumstances? He had to ask, but couldn't bring himself to do so directly.

"What did you do with my braid after the Healer removed it on Gelos II?"

Qui-Gon slowly brought his teacup back to its saucer and placed them on the table.

"Why are you so concerned about it, Padawan? The Healer said it will..."

"It will grow back, yes Master I know." Obi-Wan couldn't keep the bite out his voice, or the unexpected lump out of his throat.

"Obi-Wan, what's all this about?"

Obi-Wan sighed and winced inwardly at the shake in his breath as he exhaled. He didn't understand why this bothered him so badly, but there was only one way to find out.

"I found it. When I packed you for our mission to Gelos II."

Silence.

"Master, I shouldn't have looked in your private closet. I want you to know I don't normally do that type of thing...I mean I don't do it at all. I was just in a hurry and couldn't locate your comlink attachment, and..."

"Obi-Wan..."

"...I just came across the case and had to know what was inside and..."

"Obi-Wan!"

Pause. "Yes, Master?"

"It's alright, Obi-Wan."

"No it's not, Master!" Obi-Wan exclaimed, surprised by the angry edge in his voice and in his heart. "Why do you keep it like it is your most valued treasure and you don't even...even..." Obi-Wan stopped and struggled for calm. What right did he have to accuse his Master in such a way? And what was he accusing him of, exactly? He looked up at Qui-Gon, expecting a reprimand.

But Qui-Gon was resolutely looking at his teacup, with an expression of sorrow.

"You mean why do I keep Xanatos' Padawan braid and wasn't concerned about yours in the infirmary."

It wasn't a question.

Obi-Wan sighed. "I am sorry Master. It's not my place to question you about...him."

"Obi-Wan...This discovery was troubling you during our mission?"
Still not looking up.

"Yes, Master. I couldn't center myself. I'm sorry. I do not know why it upsets me so."

"Perhaps because it makes you question your place as my Padawan. It shouldn't."

Qui-Gon finally lifted his eyes to face Obi-Wan. "I keep it to remind me of my own role in Xanatos' turning. He sent it to me a short time after he fled, enclosed in the case as you saw it. The message with it said 'Don't forget, I learned everything from you, Master.' And I never have forgotten."

Qui-Gon's gaze shifted downwards again, and before Obi-Wan even knew what he was doing, he rose from the chair, and crossed the narrow space between them to sit next to Qui-Gon.

"I'm sorry, Master. I didn't know. " A realization hit him like the blaster bolt had. "Master, you must know that I would never..."

A sad smile passed over Qui-Gon's lips. "Oh, Obi-Wan, I know...I know you would never chose the dark path. The prideful part of me likes to think that's because I learned from my mistakes with Xanatos and didn't repeat them with you."

Qui-Gon paused, then began again slowly. "For some time after I took you as my Padawan, I looked for the darkness in you - expected it. At some point - a few years ago I suppose - I stopped looking because I finally realized there was none to be found - only light.

So I never gave you praise or encouragement like I should, or let you know how proud I was of your accomplishments, or that you were valued and valuable. Infinitely more than any braid. I've been very much harder on you than I should have been and made you prove yourself over and over when you should not have had to do. I have only myself to blame for that. I acted out of fear."

Obi-Wan looked at his Master's face in profile, and remembered the soft caress of his hand the night before. Again, anger flared in his heart, but it was a protective sort of anger, as if he should be able to draw Qui-Gon out of this misery.

"You loved him?"

Qui-Gon looked up at Obi-Wan then with surprise. He knew what kind of love Obi-Wan referred to.

"Yes." Qui-Gon paused, but Obi-Wan knew he had more to say.

"He suggested we might...be together...after his Knighting. I know now he only said this in an attempt to shorten the time to his trials."

Upon hearing these words, Obi-Wan finally understood the source of his tumultuous feelings of the past days. He wanted Qui-Gon's love - love beyond what an Apprentice should expect from his Master. He had for some time. There was only one way to find out if Qui-Gon felt the same way, but it was so very hard to voice his feelings. Obi-Wan gathered his courage.

"Master, I've come to realize that I want to be with you in that way, and stay with you when I'm Knighted - if I'm Knighted." Obi-Wan looked away. "Can you feel that way for me?"

Slowly, Qui-Gon lifted his hands to cup Obi-Wan's face. "Obi-Wan. You wish that? With me?"

Obi-Wan turned his head enough to kiss the gentle fingers on his face. "Master, you are of the light also. Never doubt that. You were treated badly, and rewarded with betrayal when you gave only kindness."

Pause. Qui-Gon looked down at Obi-Wan with a mixture of confusion, incredulity, sadness.

With trepidation, Obi-Wan continued. "I love you, Qui-Gon. I didn't realize how much or what type of love I had for you until I found that braid. When I thought you still valued it...valued him so much I was jealous. Not a worthy emotion, I know..."

The fingers on his face lightly stroked his lips. Obi-Wan went on, asking his most important question.

"Can you let it go? Can you let what happened to you go enough...enough to love me back? Or did he destroy that chance for me?"

Qui-Gon drew him into an embrace that slowly tightened until Obi-Wan could feel his Master's rapid heartbeat and hear his breath at his ear.

"I never thought I would take another Padawan. I never thought I would find friendship again. I never dared hope that the man I grew to value above everything in this galaxy would feel this way towards me. I'm not sure what I've done to deserve a gift like you offer me, Obi-Wan, but I won't turn it down. I love you too. In every way."

Obi-Wan drew back enough to find Qui-Gon's mouth. That kiss was deep and somewhat awkward, as first kisses often are. They then went back to simply holding one another.

"Obi-Wan. If we act on our love for each other in this way, your training will be difficult. We will have to balance this new relationship with our duty as Jedi. I am still your Master. Our relationship cannot be one of equals until you become a Knight - and you will become a Knight."

Silence.

"Obi-Wan, I need to know you understand this. You have to honor your commitment of obedience to me as my Padawan Learner."

Obi-Wan pulled back gently and reached for Qui-Gon's right hand with both of his. "I understand, Master."

"It is a lot to ask of you..."

"Yes, it is" Obi-Wan replied with a wicked smile, "but I trust you."

Qui-Gon just sat and soaked up the love emanating from his Padawan, returning it twofold. Finally, he withdrew his hand from Obi-Wan's and pulled a white cloth from a pocket of his cloak. As Obi-Wan watched intently, Qui-Gon unfolded the cloth to reveal an extremely scorched Padawan braid.

His Padawan braid.

Before Qui-Gon could say a word, Obi-Wan pulled him into a searing kiss. Somewhat reluctantly, Qui-Gon drew back; enjoying the sight of excited blue-green eyes and flushed cheeks.

"Obi-Wan, no more until you are healed. I don't know what the Healer's reaction would be if I had to return you to the infirmary as a result these...activities, but I cannot imagine that it would be a good one."

"Yes, Master." With a resigned sigh, Obi-Wan leaned back on the couch with his head on Qui-Gon's shoulder; his hands again clasping his Masters'. For a long moment they both enjoyed the silence, opening themselves to the possibilities of their sudden revelations. Finally, Obi-Wan spoke.

"Master?"

"Yes?"

Silence.

"Yes, Obi-Wan?" Qui-Gon prompted

"Um...his braid. It has to go. Today."

Qui-Gon laughed and felt his heart soar free. "Of course, Obi-Wan. The case, however, is quite valuable. Perhaps I could barter it for...say...a wig?"

He wasn't prepared when Obi-Wan tackled him and they both fell sideways onto the couch in a mock and not-so platonic wrestling match. After a few seconds Obi-Wan conceded and they quieted against one another with Obi-Wan's head tucked under Qui-Gon's chin, and his leg thrown possessively over Qui-Gon's knees.

"It's going to be an interesting 10 days, Padawan."

"Indeed, Master"

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file.